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# Dead Ends and Dead Endings in the Teaching of Afro-American Literature

AUTHOR(S):

Pavloska, Susanna

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CITATION:

Pavloska, Susanna. Dead Ends and Dead Endings in the Teaching of Afro-American Literature. 英文学評論 1989, 58: 25-39

ISSUE DATE:

1989-11

URL:

[https://doi.org/10.14989/RevEL\\_58\\_25](https://doi.org/10.14989/RevEL_58_25)

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## Dead Ends and Dead Endings in the Teaching of Afro-American Literature

Susanna Pavloska

### I

In *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom describes the modern classroom as a "front" in which a war is daily being waged for the students' "souls."<sup>1</sup> Bloom's embattled language belies the fact that his arguments in favor of the Great Books, which he confidently, even breezily, defines as "certain generally recognized classic texts" (334), are made on political, rather than aesthetic grounds. During the student demonstrations at Cornell in the spring of 1969, Bloom literally needed a gun to his head before he would agree even in principle to teach what has since come to be called "Afro-American literature."<sup>2</sup>

Despite the strong resistance of Bloom and others like him, there has been an explosion of interest in Afro-American Studies during the past decade. These days, professors of American literature feel as much of a moral imperative to include an Afro-American text on their course syllabi as Bloom feels to save his students' souls. Nevertheless, because, in most cases, such texts have been merely incorporated into existing curricula, curricula constructed with a different set of assumptions from that which inform the newly-included texts, troubling questions of the legitimacy of the enterprise remain. In the face of such a moral dilemma, the question that I want to ask is simply: how does one become aware of one's unexamined assumptions in regard to literature, assumptions that might ultimately limit our effectiveness as teachers and writers? Or, more to the point: how does one read Afro-American literature?

At the center of this paper is a reading of *Maud Martha*, a novella by the

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks. By coincidence, Brooks is a resident of what in the 1940's was called "Bronzeville," the black ghetto bordering the campus of the University of Chicago, where Allan Bloom made his pronouncements on the state of American liberal education. Today, the area is less poetically referred to as "the war zone." The spacial juxtaposition of the two writers, Brooks in the ghetto, Bloom in his classroom, suggests the real-life concerns involved in the study and teaching of Afro-American literature.

What about those educators, however, who, unlike Bloom, do not require a gun to their heads to take Afro-American culture into account, and who are, in the words of one young critic, willing "to take seriously one's function and location not only in respect to established discursive, institutional, and economic orders, but also in respect to orders that have yet to be legitimated at all"?<sup>3)</sup> Realizing the expedience of narrowing the gap between black culture and the "culture" of elite institutions, a large part of the energy of Afro-American Studies in the United States has been devoted to pursuing this task of "legitimization." While these efforts have had the positive effect of rediscovering many important Afro-American texts, such investigations, if carried out self-consciously, invariably call into question the values that inform the process of canon formation in the first place. As Werner Sollors asks in "A Critique of Pure Pluralism," "should the very same categories on which previous exclusivism was based really be used as organizing concepts?"<sup>4)</sup>

The question of an Afro-American literary tradition is further complicated by the particular historical situation in which black authorship is located; Sollors goes on to ask, "is there a link from the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin to those of Frederick Douglass and Mary Antin, or must we see Douglass exclusively as a version of Olaudah Equiano and a precursor to Malcolm X? Is Zora Neale Hurston only Alice Walker's foremother?" (257). It quickly becomes apparent that the process of canon formation represents nothing less than a wholesale distortion and effacement of history.<sup>5)</sup>

The cultural productions described by the portmanteau word, "Afro-American," are not simply a mixture of "African" and "American" elements,

but rather a compounding of the experience of people of African descent with a specific set of historical conditions in the presence of the numerous other social groups that comprise "America." In addition, the somewhat uncomfortable abbreviation "Afro" (as a black colleague once asked, "Has anyone ever actually *met* an "Afro"? ) points to the problematic nature of the concept of "Africa" in Afro-American culture.<sup>6</sup> Unlike other "hyphenated Americans," such as Polish-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and the like, Afro-Americans do not trace their roots back to a specific country of origin, nor even to a common linguistic background. Furthermore, even those critics who insist on the necessity of reading Afro-American literature within the wider context of American literature tend to assume that the influence is all one-sided, ignoring the profound effect that Afro-American culture has had on American culture as a whole.

While, for obvious reasons, the majority of critics feel most comfortable focusing on the "American" in "Afro-American," a more relevant concern in the teaching of Afro-American literature is with the mirror-image, the Afro-American in the American. Without an awareness of one's particular position in relation to the "Afro-American," the "other" within American culture, the danger is always present that in seeking to justify our interest in the other, we, that is, non-Afro American readers, will simply fashion it into an image of our own desire. The situation is further complicated when the reader is a non-American reading Afro-American texts through the lens of different (generically) "American" critics.

The paradigm for the transformation of the "African" into the "Afro-American," the rape of the black slave by the white master, is based on one such desire. As the white slave masters continued to father their own human property, producing mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons—each new generation lighter in color, and therefore more "pleasing" than the last—this desire became the attraction of the Self in the Other indeed.

It is in the articulation of this elusive otherness that the challenge of Afro-American literature is to be found. If even with the spate of recent scholar-

ship, the "African" in "Afro-American" remains mysterious, it is because "scholarship" can only go so far, and must be supplemented with new ways of reading. It is towards an understanding of this process that I will offer a reading of *Maud Martha*.

## II

The career of Gwendolyn Brooks is illustrative of the problems implicit in the effort to establish an Afro-American literary canon. Brooks began writing during the lull between the hoopla of what has retrospectively been dubbed "the Harlem Renaissance," and the literary and commercial prominence achieved by black women writers in the 1970's. In 1950, Brooks was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for *Annie Allen*, her second book of poetry, a fact that seemed to confirm her as a member of the group of serious poets, black or white. During the late 1960's Brooks became involved with the radical politics of the Black Power Movement; in 1968 she was appointed Poet Laureate of Illinois. To date, Brooks has published seventeen books of poetry, five of prose, and taught at such schools as Columbia University, the City College of New York, and the University of Wisconsin. Appropriately enough for the subject of such a career, Brooks literally makes her home on the dividing line between the university and the ghetto.

*Maud Martha*, Brooks's only completed full-length work of prose fiction, is the story of a Bronzeville girl's growth to maturity during the years of the Depression and the Second World War. It is a short work, composed of a series of thirty-four loosely-connected vignettes of three to ten pages, often separated by time lapses of several years, connected only, Brooks has stated, by "the central point of view of Maud Martha herself as she grows up." The opening vignette, "description of Maud Martha," is characteristic of Brooks's method:

What she liked was candy buttons, and books, and painted music [deep blue or delicate silver] and the west sky, so altering, viewed from the steps of the back porch, and dandelions... But dandelions were what she chiefly saw. Yellow

jewels for everyday, studding the patched green dress of her back yard. She liked their demure prettiness second to their everydayness, for in that latter quality she thought she saw a picture of herself, and it was comforting to find what was common could also be a flower.<sup>7)</sup>

The emphasis is firmly, almost doggedly, on the ordinary, the everyday. While the scale is deliberately small, limited to the experience of one person living in what were socially very straitened circumstances, even a full view of this compass is denied to us: Maud Martha grows up during the Depression, she encounters racial discrimination, her husband is drafted and goes off to fight in the Second World War, she suffers and feels ugly and unwanted and victimized, yet there is no explicit mention of these circumstances. What access we have to the possible significance of each vignette is suggested only by the abundance of metaphor: "painted music," dandelions as "yellow jewels for everyday," insights fashioned from ordinary materials. Early reviewers of the novella drew parallels to literary "Impressionism," and "Imagism," but such formal pronouncements did little to illuminate the text. The novella was largely ignored, and soon went out of print.<sup>8)</sup>

Despite these difficulties, *Maud Martha* is acknowledged to have exerted an important influence on Afro-American fiction. Paule Marshall, whose 1959 novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is often referred to as the forerunner of the black women's literary explosion of the 1970's, declared *Maud Martha* to be the "first novel she read that permitted a black woman a rich interior life, and provided the inspiration for her own writing about black women."<sup>9)</sup> According to the critic Barbara Christian, "Brooks's contribution was a turning point because it represented for the first time a black woman not as a mammy, wench, mulatto, or downtrodden heroine, but as an ordinary human being in all the wonder of her complexity."<sup>10)</sup> In rejecting these stereotypes, which, in a literary establishment predominantly by, for, and about the white middle class, possessed the status of literary *conventions*, *Maud Martha* risked, and suffered, commercial neglect. It is largely due to the subsequent commercial success of such black authors as Paule Marshall, Ntozake Shange, Maya Angelou, Alice

Walker, and Toni Morrison that scholars of Afro-American literature have extrapolated backwards to recover *Maud Martha* and bring it back into print.

Occupying a "hole" in the reconstructed black literary canon, the novella's tightly-written, metaphoric style make it amenable to a criticism that takes as its object the gaps, holes, and silences in a text. In this respect, Afro-American criticism owes much to the efforts of feminist critics to articulate the silences, doubletalk, and other ploys characteristic of women's writing, a methodology that in turn derives from the ideological criticism of Pierre Macherey and the historical investigations of Michel Foucault.<sup>11)</sup> What these critical methods have in common, besides an oppositional political stance, is the idea that a literary text, like the human psyche, has an "unconscious" that exists under a state of repression, that the traces of which can be glimpsed, under the proper conditions, in the text's "conscious," manifest content. A version of this idea is suggested by "a phenomenon in black culture":

You have a little black church back in the marsh and you're going to sing, "Go Down, Moses" [but] every now and then the members of the congregation want to break loose and sing 'Oh Freedom'... Whenever they sing that, they've got this big old black pot in the vestibule, and as they sing they pound the pot. That way, no white folks are going to hear. The drowning effect, this banging on the pot to drown out what they are actually saying about feminism, came in with the first woman's novel... Many woman novelists have even succeeded in hiding the covert or implicit feminism in their books from themselves...<sup>12)</sup>

Mary Helen Washington, who has written the most comprehensive analysis of *Maud Martha* to date, compares the novella's failure to establish a critical rapport with the heroine's own reticence, a reticence that Washington describes as that of a woman "whose rage makes her literally unable to speak."<sup>13)</sup> This rage is most often expressed in terms of an aesthetic/social conflict. In an explicit rejection of the racist standards of value manifested by the "color line," Brooks provides us with an inexorably dark-skinned heroine.<sup>14)</sup> In fact, *Maud Martha* is probably the first "black" heroine in Afro-American fiction: Harriet Jacobs, Helga Crane, and Janie Crawford were all represented as being light-skinned.<sup>15)</sup> Their narratives are generated precisely from the fact that

their "beauty" created desire both within the narrative and outside it. Although numerous commentators have written about the thematic of the heroine's "war with beauty," the most significant manifestations of this preoccupation with "ugliness" lie on the stylistic level.<sup>16)</sup>

Maud Martha describes herself as the color of "cocoa straight" (53). It is an interesting metaphor; unlike light cocoa, cocoa straight is undiluted, and the unavoidable associations with miscegenation and rape are relevant here. Furthermore, cocoa straight is not so sweet to the taste. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which was published in 1952, the year before *Maud Martha*, was, for all its perceived faults, well-received by the critics because it could be situated in an existing tradition: that, in the words of Irving Howe, of the "journey of a single man toward contemporary America in search of success, companionship, and finally, himself."<sup>17)</sup> *Invisible Man* might be a novel of black rage, alienation and despair, but it could also be seen as a political satire, a picaresque, and an example of any number of other traditions in which the critics could find reason to place it. *Maud Martha*, on the other hand, "stood alone": its disjointed style eluded the usual processes of classification. In this sense, *Maud Martha* was the one that could truly be called "invisible."

In this stylistic of reticence, refusal, and defeated desire, the role played by the silences in the text become most important. As Foucault asserts, "Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name; the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies."<sup>18)</sup> Furthermore, silence can be an important component of the constitution of a specific historical moment: Barbara Christian, in her article "Nuance and the Novella," writes, "in its focus on a single character or situation rather than the totality of a society and in its economy of presentation, the novella may summarize the essentials of a period that has just ended and be an initial exploration into attitudes that are just forming. Though not consciously intending to write a novella, the writer may find that in



trying to express the moment of transition from one mode of interpreting reality to another, the present cannot be expressed in the novels of the past, nor is the totality of the new reality understood enough to transform it."<sup>19</sup> *Maud Martha*, she argues, is the site of just this kind of problematic representation. The silences that both surround and permeate the text take us to the edge of an ideological aporia. While desiring social change, the author is at a loss to envision the form that such change would take, so the most honest response is simply one of bafflement.

If the obtrusive and unsettling silences in the text succeed in preventing the narrative from sinking into the merely banal, a characteristic often associated with women's writing, the narrative focus then appears to be epic in scope: most of cocoa-colored Maud Martha's emotional energy is invested in the way she looks. One of the major contributions of feminist and psychoanalytic criticism is the recognition of the fact that such "trivial" concerns can be of monumental importance. In Brooks's flamboyantly mock-epic poem, "The Anniad," the untameability of the heroine's hair becomes a metaphor of repressed rebellion:

Think of thaumaturgic lass  
 Looking in her looking glass  
 At the unembroidered brown  
 Printed bastard roses there  
 Then emotionally aware  
 Of the black and boisterous hair  
 Taming all that anger down<sup>20</sup>

The presence of the grandiose word "thaumaturgic" transforms the very ordinary, and very common, scene of the young girl gazing at herself in the mirror into a scene of ekphrasis. Even prior to Lacan, the act of mirror-gazing has been one that is particularly rich in mythic and psychological resonances. Here, the disparate pieces from which the subject of the poem is trying to constitute an identity seem to be composed of her different racial components: a "good" one, descended from the language of courtly poetry ("rosy cheeks"), and the "unembroidered" reality: brown skin, black hair. The word

"bastard," all the more striking for its proximity to "thaumaturgic," suggests that the task of trying to reconcile the two is not a "legitimate" enterprise.

As if in compensation for the illegitimacy, and perhaps impossibility, of this enterprise, another strain of Brooks's early poetry portrays life in the margins of beauty and the social order as being characterized by an increased intensity of experience, as in the 1945 poem, "Sadie and Maud" (curiously, with the characters of Maud and her sister reversed):

Maud went to college.  
Sadie stayed home.  
Sadie scraped life  
With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in.  
Her comb found every strand  
Sadie was one of the livingest chits  
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies  
Under her maiden name  
Maud and Ma and Papa  
Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long  
Her girls struck out for home.  
(Sadie left as heritage  
Her fine-tooth comb.)

Maud, who went to college,  
Is a thin brown mouse.  
She is living all alone  
In this old house.<sup>21)</sup>

Already in this, her first collection of poems, Brooks addresses the problems implicit in the idea of "heritage." The subject of "Sadie and Maud" is marginality deliberately chosen and celebrated. The homeliness of the metaphor of the "fine-tooth comb" demands an intimate frame of reference. Images of autochthony abound: Sadie's two female children, born under her own name, do not exist in the Name of the Father; in that respect they are "invisible." The legacy that they receive, however, is vital and real. The

unusual construction, “strike out *for* home” suggests that Sadie’s daughters are engaged in a process of recovery. Meanwhile, Maud, the participant in the “journey toward contemporary America in search of success, companionship, and finally him (her) self,” is left “alone” with the dubious legacy of an “old house.” Whether it be James’s House of Fiction or Dickinson’s House of Possibility, Brooks makes it clear that for the black heroine of her poem, “home” is located somewhere outside the accepted measure of white worldly success.

In her autobiography, *Report from Part One*, Brooks tells us that the first passage that she wrote for the novella became the opening of the final chapter, making it an overture/reprise of the themes of the novel as a whole.<sup>22</sup> It is a section whose conclusion has puzzled modern-day critics as much as its fragmented narrative style had puzzled its contemporary reviewers. The Second World War has recently ended, and Maud’s habitual reticence gives way to an expansive, even triumphant, mood as she contemplates the news that she is pregnant with her second child:

Maud Martha, with her daughter, got out-of-doors. She did not need information, or solace, or a guidebook, or a sermon—not in this sun!—not in this blue air!

They “marched,” they battled behind her brain—the men who had drunk beer with the best of them, the men with two arms off and two legs off, the men with parts of faces. Then her guts divided, then her eyes swam under frank mist.

And the Negro press (on whose front pages beamed the usual representations of womanly Beauty, pale and pompadoured) carried the stories of the latest of the Georgia and Mississippi lynchings...

But the sun was shining, and some of the people in the world had been left alive, and it was doubtful whether the ridiculousness of man would ever succeed in destroying the basic equanimity of the commonest flower: for would its kind not come up again in the spring? Come up, if necessary, among, between, or out of—bestly inconvenient!—the smashed corpses lying in strict composure, in that hush infallible and sincere.

And was that not something to be thankful for?

And, in the meantime, while people did live they would be grand, would be glorious and brave, would have nimble hearts that would beat and beat. They would even get up nonsense, through wars, through divorces, through evictions and jiltings and taxes.

And, in the meantime, she was going to have another baby.  
The weather was bidding her bon voyage.<sup>23)</sup>

Up to this point, historical events—the Depression, the Second World War—had been strangely absent from the narrative, underscoring Bronzeville's moral and material isolation. Even the end of the war has for Maud Martha a largely personal significance, functioning as a metaphor for the end of the war that she had been fighting with herself. This final episode is separated from the preceding one by an interval of about four months. We have not been allowed to witness the events that led to the turning point, nor are we allowed to witness its results.<sup>24)</sup> Once again, the narrative is hemmed in on all sides by silence.

Modern readers have tried to reconcile Maud Martha's triumphant pregnancy, a topos most often seen in anti-feminist writings,<sup>25)</sup> with what they interpret as the novel's feminist politics. Paule Marshall conjectures that Brooks denies her heroine the artistic fulfillment that she herself enjoyed in order to "expiate her own deviance in succeeding in the world of men. There is some need to satisfy the domestic role... and so (she) lets (her) characters live it. Maud Martha's pregnancy takes the place of Gwendolyn Brooks' poems."<sup>26)</sup> Such a reading is an example of the "phallacious" tendency to assign a lower value to that which is perceived as lacking the Phallus, as castrated, as feminine.<sup>27)</sup> On the other hand, Washington's positive reading of Maud Martha's pregnancy as "a powerful way of being in the world" neglects the fact that the text states that the weather "was bidding her *bon voyage*." "Bon voyage" indicates an exit, not a re-entry. What Maud Martha seems to be leaving behind is the mind-rule perpetrated by the "pale and pompadoured" representatives of female beauty promulgated by the "Negro press." In the past, in order to lay claim to universal human rights, Maud Martha had to adopt "universal" standards of beauty. Once she realizes the arbitrary nature of this "universal," the other "laws," on which war and racial hatred are based, are exploded as well. Maud Martha characterizes her triumph as that of the "least

and commonest flower" (at the beginning of the novel Maud Martha describes herself as a "dandelion—a yellow jewel for everyday"), whose very invisibility insures its survival. If Maud Martha is seen as the progenitor of a new tradition, it is appropriate that it is represented by a baby, which constitutes a copy of herself, and *not* a poem, which would lead back to the current order of things and "visibility."

Thus we have moved from questions of legitimacy to the deliberate denial of legitimacy; can we now say that we have, at last, isolated a uniquely Afro-American style of writing? Unfortunately, the answer is not that easy. In 1968 Mary Ellmann described this kind of survival strategy, which she describes as the cultivation of "idiocy," as a typical response to the aftermath of the Second World War and its "sense of immanent catastrophe":

'A million sleepers turn,' Kenneth Rexroth says, 'While bombs fall in their dreams.' And they dream too that if anything survives, it will be primitive, stubborn, senseless, no more than a stupid refusal *not* to survive. The imagination turns, regrettably, against the lunatic (informed, analytic, articulate) ideal, and idiocy, for all its presumed effeminacy, comes into its own.<sup>28)</sup>

In the seemingly perverse choices it makes, of "ugliness" over "beauty" and "invisibility" over "legitimacy," *Maud Martha* engages an alternate system of signification characterized by a sense of alienation from mainstream, universalized culture. Yet at the same time, we must recognize that the alternate system of values that *Maud Martha* engages is as much a part of the existing system, and thus of history, as the one that it opposes. All we can say in relation to the problem of reading texts marked by a sense of alienation that, because of historical circumstances, we do not share, is that it is necessary to adopt new, and at times "illegitimate" reading strategies. The solution is not to teach greater quantities of Afro-American literature, but to teach it with an eye to this fact.

## NOTES

This essay is dedicated to Richard Lim.

- 1) Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished The Souls of Today's Students* (New York: 1987), p. 22. All future references are incorporated into the text.
- 2) See Bloom, p. 313. A word about terminology: "Afro-American" continues to be the standard term used to designate the *cultural productions* of those Americans whose ancestry includes members of the group of people who were brought to the United States from Africa as slaves, while "black" (usually, but not always uncapitalized) is the preferred term for naming the people themselves. The current debate involving the Rev. Jesse Jackson and others over the difference between the terms "African-American," "Afro-American," and "black," is an indication on the semantic level of how uncomfortable the racial situation in the United States is.
- 3) Danny Goldberg, "The Dead Endings of Afro-American Criticism," talk given at the Modern Language Association panel on "Blackness as a Commodity in the Profession," New Orleans, December 1988. I owe Danny numerous debts, including the title of this paper.
- 4) Werner Sollors, "A Critique of Pure Pluralism," in Sacvan Bercovitch, ed. *Reconstructing American Literary History* (Cambridge: 1986), p. 255. Subsequent references are incorporated into the text.
- 5) On this point, Frank Lentriccia remarks, "the new idealism of the intertextual method (both Derridean and Bloomian) of anxiety-ridden historicisms... (functions) as if poets engaged their dead poetic ancestors, and only their *dead* canonical ancestors." See "Patriarchy Against itself: The Young Manhood of Wallace Stevens," *Critical Inquiry* 13 (Summer 1987), pp. 759-60.
- 6) For a more detailed discussion of the historical process by which the "African" was systematically transformed within and effaced from "American" culture, see Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (Cambridge: 1980).
- 7) Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 2. All future citations are from this edition.
- 8) For a complete discussion of *Maud Martha* and its contemporary reviewers, see Mary Helen Washington, "The Darkened Eye Restored: Notes Toward a Literary History of Black Women," in *Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Woman, 1860-1960* (Garden City (NY): 1987), pp. x-xix. *Maud Martha* has most recently been reprinted in Brooks's latest anthology, *Blacks* (New York: 1988).
- 9) Mary Helen Washington, "'Taming All That Anger Down': Rage and Silence in the Writing of Gwendolyn Brooks," *Invented Lives*, p. 404.
- 10) Barbara Christian, *Black Woman Novelists: The Making of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Westport (CT): 1980), p. 239.

- 11) See Pierre Macherey, *Pour une theorie de la production litteraire* (Paris: 1970); Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: 1975); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: 1978); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Yale: 1979); for a more general discussion of discourse's ever-present "other," see Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: 1981).
- 12) Annis V. Pratt, "The New Feminist Criticisms: Exploring the History of a New Space," in *Beyond Intellectual Sexism: A New Woman, A New Reality*, ed. Joan I. Roberts (New York: 1976), p.183.
- 13) Washington, p. 387.
- 14) The "color line" refers to the aesthetic hierarchy existing within black culture that tended to "create a problem *within* the group similar to that between colored and white in America," with a premium placed on light-colored, or "high yellow" skin. See Arthur P. Davis, "The Black-and-Tan Motif in the Poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks," *College Language Association Journal* 6 (Dec. 1962), pp. 90-97. Quoted in Harry B. Shaw, "Maud Martha: The War with Beauty," in Maria K. Mootry, Gary Smith, eds., *A Life Distilled: Gwendolyn Brooks, Her Poetry and Fiction* (Urbana: 1987), p. 254.
- 15) Harriet Jacobs, mulatto author of the *Diary of a Slave Girl* (186-); Helga Crane, half-Danish, half West Indian heroine of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928); Janie Crawford, mulatto heroine of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).
- 16) For a comprehensive discussion of the theme of Maud Martha's aesthetic battle, see Shaw, pp. 254-270.
- 17) Howe, quoted in Washington, xvi.
- 18) Michel Forcault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, p. 309.
- 19) Barbara Christian, "Nuance and the Novella," in Maria Mootry, Gary Smith, eds., *The Art of Gwendolyn Brooks* (Carbondale: 1987), p. 245. Christian is basing her discussion of the novella on that given in Georg Lukacs's essay on Solzhenitsyn's novella, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*, in which he states that historically, novellas are "either in the phase of the not yet (*noch nicht*) in the artistically universal mastery of a given social world, or the phase of the no longer (*nicht mehr*)." Georg Lukacs, *Solzhenitsyn*. Trans. William David Graf (Cambridge: 1969), p. 7.
- 20) Gwendolyn Brooks, from "The Anniad," *Annie Allen* (NY: 1949).
- 21) Gwendolyn Brooks, "Sadie and Maud," *A Street in Bronzeville* (NY: 1945).
- 22) Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report from Part One* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972) p. 190.
- 23) Brooks, *Maud Martha*, pp. 178-180.
- 24) Although in an unfinished sequel to *Maud Martha*, entitled *The Rise of Maud Martha*, Brooks does depict Maud Martha's growing independence and self-expression. In light of what we have been saying about history, it is interesting that Brooks eventually abandoned the project.

- 25) See, for example, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's discussion of Tennyson's "Princess Ida" in *The War of the Words: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: 1988), p. 10.
- 26) Washington, p. 365.
- 27) The *locus classicus* of this idea, of course, is the work of Jacques Derrida dating from the period of 1964–67 and published in *De la Grammatologie* (Paris, 1967), English trans. *Of Grammatologie* (Baltimore, 1976) and *L' Ecriture et la différence* (Paris, 1967), English trans.: *Writing and Difference* (Chicago, 1978). See also Jacques Lacan, "La signification du phallus," *Écrits* (Paris, 1966). Partial English trans. *Écrits: A Selection* (London, 1977).
- 28) Mary Ellmann. *Thinking About Women* (New York: 1968), p. 109.